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ABSTRACT

The need for passenger transportation is widely recognized by rural communities. Shrinking federal funding has led many communities and human service agencies to experiment with innovative approaches to provide transportation services. One such approach is the use of cooperative organizations to provide needed services. A study conducted by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets developed three rural transportation alternatives based on the cooperative model. The first alternative provides for a cooperative composed of public and private human service agency transportation providers and the users of that transporatation service. The cooperative could begin with a simple clearinghouse function and move toward providing all transportation services for its members. The second cooperative model would consist of service club members, human service agencies, and community residents and would depend on volunteers to maintain a transportation network for rural residents. The third alternative incorporates rural postal carriers into either the human service agency cooperative or the service club cooperative. Rural postal routes--extending into virtually all isolated rural areas--would provide a ready-made transportation system to augment existing systems at a low cost. Among the benefits of the cooperative model would be the ability to shape state and federal programs to local needs. (JHZ)

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The Cooperative Organization and Rural Passenger Transportation: An Approach to Community Development

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The Cooperative Organization and Rural Passenger Transportation: An Approach to Community Development

ABSTRACT

Community development has been traditionally viewed as community self-help efforts to develop institutions to meet local needs. The community development approach today works to encourage existing community organizations to adapt externally controlled programs to local needs.

Passenger transportation is a local need recognized by rural communities. Shrinking federal funding has led many communities and human service agencies to experiment with innovative approaches to provide transportation services. One such approach is to use the cooperative organization as a mechanism to provide needed services.

The cooperative, long used in rural areas to pool farmer resources to provide member services, is a formal organizational structure that could be used to coordinate rural transportation. The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets recently completed a study which developed three rural passenger transportation alternatives.

The first alternative provides for a cooperative composed of public and private human service agency transportation providers and the users of that transportation service. The activities such a cooperative can undertake begin with a simple clearinghouse function and move toward providing all transportation services for its members.

The second cooperative would rely on a service club/civic organization to provide rural passenger transportation. Made up of service club members, human service agencies and community residents, the cooperative would depend on volunteers to maintain a transportation network for rural residents.

A third alternative incorporates rural postal carriers into either the human service agency cooperative or the service club cooperative. Consisting of routes that extend into virtually all isolated rural areas, rural postal delivery routes provide a ready-made transportation system to augment existing passenger transportation at a low cost.

By formally structuring rural passenger activities of private and public organizations, the cooperative links state and federal transportation resources with those available through local organizations. By fostering local coordination of transportation resources, the cooperative approach can also strengthen community institutional ability to adapt outside assistance to local need.

The Cooperative Organization and Rural Passenger Transportation: An Approach to Community Development

Introduction

Rural passenger transportation gained national policy attention in the late 1960's when lack of transportation limited effective rural service delivery. Despite the 1973 Rural Highway Public Transportation Demonstration Program (Section 147) and the 1978 Formula Grant Program for Areas Other than Urbanized (the Section 18 Program), rural passenger transportation remains a recognized need in rural communities (Burkhardt, 1981).

National statistics indicate that 15 percent of rural households do not own a car. Fifty-two percent of rural households own one car, leaving the family without transportation when the car is used for the work trip. Of the rural poor, 57 percent do not own a car (U.S.D.A., 1980). Few alternatives are available to rural residents without cars: a 1978 study (Kidder) of transportation in places of less than 10,000 found intercity bus service in 42 percent of the places sampled. Public transit was present in 7 percent of the places under 10,000.

Yet Federal funding for rural passenger transportation has remained static and is likely to decrease further with efforts to curb the federal deficit. In view of expected reductions in Federal funds, rural transportation providers need to begin evaluating resources available to meet local demand. By mobilizing local resources to meet a felt local need, transportation providers are in fact taking an approach long used in community development work.

However, the traditional community development approach, which advocates individual or organizational mobilization of local individuals to resolve a community need, requires modification to adapt to contemporary local institutional complexity and outward orientation of community organizations. The remainder of this paper examines the relevance of the community development approach in today's rural community and explores the cooperative as a strategy to coordinate community transportation resources.

Community Development: A Summary Overview

Long part of the American self-help tradition, community development became a directed activity in the early days of rural sociology (Phifer et al, 1980:18-37). Rural community studies focused on community institutions and saw the need for individual involvement in community activities where rural centers were declining (Hofsommer, 1934; Lively, 1932; Melvin, 1931; Sanderson, 1934; Smith, 1933). While earlier efforts concentrated on intra-community resources, later activities recognized the need to involve extra-community assistance. The United Nations developed a definition which included external resources as an essential component of community development activity:

> The term 'community development' designates the utilization under one single program of approaches and techniques which rely upon local communities as units of action and which attempt to combine outside assistance with organized local self-determination and effort, and which correspondingly seek to stimulate local initiative and leadership as the primary instrument of change. (UNESCO, 1956:23)

Originally associated with Land Grant Schools and focused on small and/or rural communities, community development methods were adopted by Lyndon

Johnson's great society programs during the 1960's. Applied to urban settings, the community development approach was used to organize participants in anti-poverty programs designed to involve a broad cross section of community residents (Constantino-David, 1982; Miller, 1983).

Community development as an activity embodies several underlying assumptions, whether it is utilized in an urban or a rural setting. It sees people as "capable of both perceiving and judging the condition of their lives; that they have the will and capacity to plan together in accordance with these judgments to change that condition for the better; that they can act together in accordance with these plans." (Roberts, 1979:xv; Sisaye and Stommes, 1981:54-5). Further, community development can be seen as an applied behavioral science which is value centered and normative. It is concerned with "the total human climate or milieu" and emphasizes intervention in group and collective situations. Seeking to involve broad participation, it develops inter- and intra-personal skills. Viewing the community as an integrated system, it is primarily concerned with "ongoing management of change." (Blakely, 1978:15-23).

Local involvement, broad participation and community activity outline what community development does: it does not define the locale in which that activity takes place. The particular approach utilized in a community development activity depends upon the way in which community is defined. Since the beginning of the community development approach, that definition has undergone several modifications (Warren, 1972:21-51; Lauderdale and Peterson, 1971).

The earliest understanding of community revolved about spatial boundaries. Galpin's study of a rural New York community conceptualized a built-up trade center with its surrounding trade area (Galpin, 1915). Urban studies focused on concentric activity zones were pioneered by Robert E. Park at the University of Chicago.

A second interpretation of community involved the people living in a particular geographic area. Demographic descriptions by location enabled researchers to outline expected community social and economic patterns.

Recognizing that geographic location alone does not indicate a community, researchers emphasized the importance of shared institutions and values in specifying the outlines of a particular community.

A fourth area defining community has been the interaction of local people within a given community as that interaction relates to community activity. While earlier work focused on intra-community interaction, more recent research recognizes the extra-community basis for much community activity.

Community power structure analysis has examined the distribution and exercise of power in communities. Studies have analyzed who uses power, how it is exercised and what issues give rise to different community power configurations.

A concept linking many of the earlier community development approaches looks at communities as a social system. Based on the idea of structured interaction between two or more units, the social systems approach views a

community as composed of subsystems which together constitute a community "system." Community subsystems include, for example, churches, town and village government, county human service agencies, voluntary and not-for-profit organizations. Each subsystem performs a specific function within the community, with some subsystems overlapping as to function and participant involvement. The local Community Action Program may serve individuals who also may participate in Social Services programs.

Viewing a community as a social system composed of subsystems introduces another dimension into community analysis. Warren refers to the dimension as a community's vertical and horizontal pattern.

Many community institutions are part of an extra-community organization which may have a regional, national or international base. While geographically located within a community, the institution must meet performance standards mandated by the larger organization of which it is a part. A branch office of Chase-Manhattan, for example, must meet lending standards imposed by the National Office - not those approved by the community. Such vertical patterns influence institutional behavior within a community as much as - if not more than - local community standards. Awareness of an institution's vertical pattern is an integral consideration in community development analysis.

Community institutions exist not only in relation to their parent organization, but also co-exist with other institutions located in the same geographic area. The relation of these local units to each other form a community's horizontal pattern. Community Chests, Chambers of Commerce and

United Way are examples of formalized horizontal relations among local institutions whose primary orientation is towards extra-community organizations.

Community Development: A Contemporary Interpretation

Beginning with an interpretation of community development as an activity involving broad participation of community residents to meet a felt community need, the field has moved to an understanding of community as a social system with subsystem units primarily responding to extra-community priorities. The change in interpretation of community of necessity has led to a shift in how community development can be conducted.

Bradshaw and Blakely (1979:143-4) state that the social and economic changes in American society brought about by technological advances since World War II have led to "a revised set of responsibilities for community development, which considerably expands traditional roles, and a set of new directions for the profession." Outlining appropriate definitions and strategies for traditional and industrial societies, they describe modifications needed to carry out community development activities in advanced industrial society. Of particular interest are their observations on changing participation patterns, rural institutions, rural development policy structure and the focus of development strategy.

In traditional/industrial society, formal participation is underdeveloped and in need of effective leadership. In advanced industrial society, however, new and highly organized groups make new demands on the community and require new methods of conflict resolution.

Rural institutions to carry out change activities needed to be created in traditional/industrial society: today, rural institutions are successful in responding to local needs. To be most effective in meeting those needs, they require coordination with regional, state and national resources.

While policy in the past was developed within existing government structure with somewhat limited capacity, policy is now developed in response to federal and/or external pressures. New organization is needed to implement policies to meet local needs and interests.

Finally, and most critically, development strategy in the past was focused on self-help strategies through the introduction of outside technology to build local resources and to integrate the community into the larger social system. Today, rural insitutions need coordination and need to set up information-sharing networks on a wider basis in order to provide needed local services.

Rural Passenger Transportation: A Rural Community Need

As an approach to resolve community-based problems, community development can offer a means of analyzing the community resources necessary to resolve recognized needs and can, in addition, provide a method for organizing those resources to meet a community need. A study recently completed by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets demonstrates how the community development approach can be used to analyze and meet a recognized community need.

Based on research funded through the USDA, Office of Transportation by UMTA, Office of Service and Methods Demonstration, the study examines the feasibility of using the cooperative approach to provide rural passenger transportation. In their request for proposal, USDA stipulated that the investigating agency evaluate the potential for:

- using new or existing cooperative organizations to provide passenger transportation, and
- coordinating use of existing private or public vehicles and resources.

A constraint on implementing any program that might result from the study was that no new federal funds would be available. However, use of local, state or private funding was allowable.

Cooperatives and Rural Passenger Transportation: Examination of a Community Development Method

Cooperatives have long been part of rural America, providing agricultural producers with a mechanism for marketing products, obtaining production inputs and supplying services necessary to operate a highly capitalized agriculture. Cooperatives also played an important role in bringing electricity to rural residents (Childs, 1980).

While originally confined to agricultural producer organizations and Rural Electrification Associations, cooperatives now include "buying clubs ... consumer stores, craft, credit, fishing, forestry, health, housing, legal ser-

vices ... migrant labor, mutual insurance, sewer, water" and other activities. (U.S.D.A., 1976:6).

While a cooperative can be defined in a variety of ways, the following definition describes what a cooperative consists of:

> "A cooperative is a voluntary contractual organization of persons having a mutual ownership interest in providing themselves a needed service(s) on a non-profit basis. It is usually organized as a legal entity to accomplish an economic objective through joint participation of its members ... the investment and operation risks, benefits gained, or losses incurred are shared equitably by its members in proportion to their use of the cooperative's services. A cooperative is democratically controlled by its members on the basis of their status as member users and not as investors in the capital structure of the cooperative." (Schaars, 1973).

The New York State Cooperative Corporations Law, Section 3(c), defines a cooperative as: "A corporation ... organized for the cooperative rendering of mutual help and service to its members." (New York, 1972).

Although a cooperative is largely organized like other businesses, there are some important differences that make them appropriate for rural, local passenger transportation:

1. Their main purpose is to serve members, not to provide goods or services at a profit for others.

2. Savings over the cost of business are distributed to members on the basis of use.

3. Voting control is based on membership, with the usual practice being one member - one vote.

A cooperative offers several advantages as an organizational structure for rural areas. The cooperative concept is familiar to many rural residents. It is dependent on local initiative rather than on outside interests. Control thus remains with the members, who may be local organizations as well as individuals. Since its structural functions are defined by local interests, it is a highly flexible form of organization which can respond to a wide variety of local needs.

Further, as a community development tool, a cooperative which brings together various community organizations to perform a common function, is strengthening the intra-community linkages among organizations whose primary orientation is to outside parent institutions. Through such intra-community linkages, a cooperative can render institutions more responsive to local community needs (Richards, 1984; Preston, 1983). In his discussion of current community development directions, Warren (1972:324) states that community development "is coming to be used increasingly in the United States and Canada to denote activities which have as an important focus the strengthening of the horizontal [intra-community] pattern."

The New York Study: A Summary

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets' study, conducted in cooperation with the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), examined passenger transportation patterns in two rural New York counties (Stommes, 1985; 1983).

The county was selected as the unit of study since Census data on population is available at the county level and most public and private human services are provided on a county basis. The county is also the jurisdictional unit for which a variety of data are collected by state agencies. Insofar as county institutions are oriented towards the county as a geographic entity, the county can be seen as a community with identified boundaries involving sets of individuals and groups organized according to those spatial specifications.

The first phase involved review of 1980 Census data, NYSDOT information on county transportation, taxi routes, school bus data and intercity bus routes. In the second phase, major county transportation providers identified during the first phase, were interviewed with the use of a standard questionnaire. Major providers in the two counties include: the county Agency for Retarded Citizens, Office for the Aging, the Community Action Program, the Department of Social Services. The County Human Services umbrella organization was contacted, as were several Senior Citizen organizations, a school bus operator and a church.

The results of the second phase can be summarized briefly as follows:

- passenger transportation was provided by a combination of taxis, agency-owned vehicles, agency employees' cars and volunteers.

- transportation was provided for the most part on an ad-hoc basis as needed, with many organizations counting only actual out-of-pocket

transportation expenditures, but not including staff or director time utilized in scheduling and/or providing transportation.

- each agency indicated they were able to provide clients transportation only for program mandated trips, but that there were people unable to access their services because the agency lacked transportation resources.

- each agency indicated a strong preference to give up transportation responsibilities, saying they would favor an arrangement whereby they could refer clients to a transportation provider who would be reimbursed for transportation services.

While some inter-agency transportation coordination did occur through purchase of service contracts, the primary concern of each agency was to provide mandated services to eligible clients as defined by their extra-community parent organization. Although all agencies interviewed indicated a strong interest in coordination of transportation, apparent lack of funds and time available for planning appeared to be a formidable barrier to further coordination activities. Yet each county was expending a considerable amount of money providing mandated transportation services for clients living in isolated rural areas. A cooperative would provide a mechanism that would allow each agency to meet program mandates, expand agency transportation services through use of community resources and extend transportation to rural residents without access to the private automobile.

Coordination and the Cooperative: Several Applications

The following cooperative organizations progress from information exchange activities to full-scale consolidation of agency transportation. The concepts are oriented towards varying levels of organizational complexity to provide interested communities with an array of organizational options. Each agency would retain control over its transportation resources in all alternatives, except for the consolidated transportation cooperative.

While the text refers to human service agencies as cooperative members, private and not-for-profit organizations as well as churches could also become cooperative members.

Cooperative Clearinghouse

A first level cooperative could engage in clearinghouse activities. Each agency has a listing of clients who need transportation and the type of transportation they require. The cooperating agencies could pool client lists and assign an individual in each agency the responsibility for gathering information on client trips and match this with information on transportation equipment use and availability. Geographic "pools" could be developed to transport all agency clients living in the same area to common destinations on specified days of the month. For example, clients living in the northeast quadrant of a county could be transported for medical care to a major population center on Mondays.

A microcomputer could facilitate the organization, storage and use of client/trip/transportation need information. Compilation of such data would

allow an individual to verify eligiblity, check transportation requests from the same area and schedule a trip with minimum effort.

Cooperative for Administrative Activities

A more complex cooperative would perform common transportation administration activities. Bookkeeping, accounting, client transportation record-keeping requirements, purchase of service billings and vehicle use records could be cooperatively conducted activities. Vehicle records could be kept by the cooperative, with vehicle maintenance scheduled according to state or vehicle requirements. Providers would bill users for services rendered, but administrative activities would be conducted cooperatively.

Cooperative Vehicle Maintenance and Repair

Each agency currently bears full responsibility for vehicle maintenance and repair. A cooperative could maintain records on all member-owned vehicles, scheduling required maintenance procedures when recommended. A parts inventory could be maintained, with a potential for a discount on volume purchases. The cooperative could negotiate a fleet rate for vehicle maintenance and repair. If local garages object to loss of business because individual agencies now go to several facilities, a standard rate for repair by eligible garages could be established at a county level.

Cooperative Fleet Purchase

A county-level cooperative would explore the potential for joint fleet purchase of vehicles when replacement vehicles are needed. Each agency would

retain ownership of its vehicles. The objective would be to move toward a standard vehicle that would meet the majority needs of all agencies. Such a purchase strategy would be responsive to local transportation needs while maximizing the purchasing power of individual agencies. Maintenance of a fleet of standard vehicles would be more cost effective as discount parts purchase and fleet rates could be more easily attained than with a fleet of diverse, non-standard vehicles.

Consolidated Agency Transportation Cooperative

The ultimate pasenger transportation cooperative would be a consolidated system, an organization in which the cooperative owns and operates the vehicles for member agencies. At this level of coordination, the cooperative would be fully responsible for performing all transportation functions for member agencies. It is important to note that in a cooperative arrangement, the members jointly own the vehicles and other related transportation resources. Member agencies retain control over vehicle purchase, maintenance, repair and deployment. They do not lose control, rather they delegate control as if to a transportation unit within their own agency.

In addition to cost efficiencies brought about by discount purchasing, fleet rates for maintenance and repair, reduction of redundant routes, a cooperative may also be able to reduce insurance costs for member agencies.

Service Club Cooperative: The Volunteer Option

The service club cooperative approach uses a civic organization, or several such organizations, to provide rural passenger transportation. Civic organizations or service clubs such as Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis or the Junior League, are chartered to provide community service. A rural passenger cooperative could be established as a community service.

Membership in the Service Club Cooperative would be open to any community resident interested in participating in a volunteer transportation system. General membership would consist of: riders, volunteer drivers, and volunteers to perform certain administration and operation tasks.

Membership fees for riding members could be contributed by an individual or by a third party. Riding members could earn a reduction in their fees by volunteering to perform administration or operation tasks.

The cooperative would be governed by a policy board elected by vote of the general membership. By-laws would be adopted by the general membership. Committees would be established from the general membership to perform specific functions necessary to operate a cooperative which utilizes volunteers for drivers and to perform other operating activities. A suggested committee structure would:

-- recruit members

-- supervise driver selection and training

— manage finances

— coordinate volunteer operation activities, including: scheduling, dispatching, and routing, and

— direct public relations and fund raising activities.

The cooperative would need to set priorities on transportation requests, since arranging a trip will depend upon the availability of volunteer drivers. Ride requests for routine medical appointments (non-emergency), social services, employment, and grocery shopping should be given preference.

Transportation service would be limited to fee paying riding members of the cooperative to insure the safety of both the drivers and their passengers. While drivers would continue to be responsible for vehicle registration, licensing and insurance, the cooperative would purchase additional insurance to cover the excess liability a driver would assume in transporting riding members. A Driver Selection and Training Committee would arrange for all certified drivers to participate in a Defensive Driver Training Course, Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) classes, and other safety programs. These procedures would minimize risk factors commonly used by insurance carriers to determine insurance premium rates - thereby reducing insurance costs of the cooperative.

Service Club Cooperative: The Private-Public Alternative

A second alternative cooperative utilizing service club resources would include human service agencies as the primary cooperative members, but would

involve members as volunteers. Service club membership may consist of community leaders in a variety of professional areas. Accountants, bankers, lawyers, small businessmen, professors and farmers have professional skills that could be of great use in establishing and maintaining a cooperative organization. A lawyer drawing up articles of incorporation, an accountant setting up the cooperative's financial arrangement, a professor teaching cooperative staff how to program and utilize a microcomputer are examples of the ways in which service club volunteers can extend the resources of a transportation cooperative.

Service clubs also provide seed money to local organizations and/or individuals on a periodic basis. By contributing toward the start-up costs involved in establishing a rural passenger cooperative, a service club may provide the critical local financial and leadership support necessary to initiate a formal interagency cooperative effort.

Postal Contract Routes: Utilization of a Rural Transportation System

The use of the rural postal contract route has been gaining attention in recent years as a possible transportation alternative in sparsely populated rural areas (Fleishman and Burns, 1981; Fleishman et al, 1982; Miller and Adams, 1983). Highway contract routes are contracted mail pickup and delivery routes serving rural post offices. The carriers deliver mail, generally twice a day, to outlying post offices from regional processing centers or larger post offices. The processing centers and larger post offices are located in

populated areas which are also medical, shopping and human service centers. If passenger service were added to the mail delivery routes, more isolated area residents could utilize an already established transportation system and could do so with little additional cost.

Regional postal officials in New York contacted during the study saw no restrictions on postal contract carriers transporting passengers. The only requirement is that the mail be carried in a locked box or security compartment, a condition that would not prevent carriers from transporting passengers.

Review of postal routes in the two study counties indicated that the postal service provides regular daily service to many of the more isolated communities. While all the routes did not lead to county centers, many linked with larger centers where rural residents could receive medical care, shop or obtain transportation to county centers containing human service agencies.

The potential for increased service and cost savings accruing from the use of a coordinated postal-passenger transportation service would apply to the passenger transportation alternatives discussed above. The consolidated agency transportation cooperative or either community service cooperative alternative could include coordination of passenger service with postal routes.

The transportation cooperative would need to contact postal carriers currently operating in the area to determine whether joint operation is

possible. Time schedules for each postal route would be matched with transportation needs of people living along those routes.

Another possibility is to use the lay-over time of the postal carrier to provide passenger transportation. Since many postal routes require service in the morning and afternoon only, the carrier would be available for passenger transportation service during the middle of the day. Human service agency clients and other eligible rural residents could be transported to service centers during this time.

After a passenger transportation cooperative becomes operational, it could bid on a postal contract. The cooperative would keep its vehicles productively employed and could generate more income than with passenger transportation alone.

Conclusion: The Cooperative as a Community Development Strategy

Community development, traditionally seen as community self-help efforts directed to building local institutional capability, is now being interpreted as strengthening intra-community relationships among organizations with primary links to extra-community institutions.

Subjected to increased direction from federal and state government as well as social, economic and political influence from a variety of extra-community organizations, local organizations must balance external mandates and influence with community need. One such need for rural communities is

passenger transportation. While several private and public organizations currently provide mandated transportation services, shrinking federal funds may reduce already limited rural passenger transportation service.

Coordination of agency resources alone could lead to increased cost efficiencies through improved vehicle utilization and joint administration of transportation activities. Local participation through service clubs, church groups and not-for-profit organizations would not only supplement resources available to meet local transportation need: it would also allow local organizations to shape state and federal programs to community need patterns.

The cooperative, by formally structuring rural passenger transportation activities of agencies and local community groups, links extra-community organizations with local needs. As a community institution subject to local influence, the cooperative structure allows a community to adapt externally controlled programs to local conditions.

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